

Unions hail working time opt-out win

Unions have welcomed the European Parliament vote to end the UK opt-out from the Working Time Directive. MEPs voted in December by 421 to 273 to scrap the UK's exemption from the European law which limits the working week to an average of 48 hours.

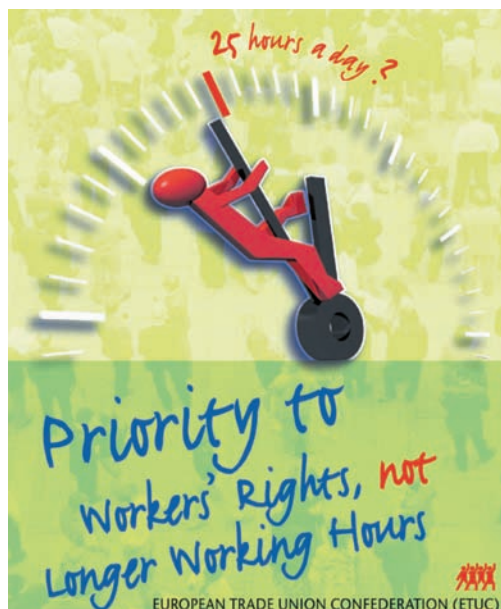
UK workers currently have some of the longest hours in Europe and unions have consistently lobbied for an end to the UK opt-out.

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: "No one should have to work more than 48 hours a week all year round to put food on the table or a roof over their heads. Now we need to tackle the low pay and poor productivity that were kept alive by long hours working."

DECENT

Senior Scottish Labour MEP David Martin also welcomed the vote.

"Scottish workers, like those in the rest of Europe, have a right to common decent working and living conditions," said Mr Martin.



"As well as the need to reconcile work and family life, the opt-out has failed to address the huge health and safety implications of working long hours in certain occupations," he said.

The vote will now go to 'conciliation' for up to eight weeks while the European Council and the European Parliament work out the future of the opt-out.

The changes to working time regulations in Britain could be phased in by 2012.

- Thousands of workers joined MEPs at an ETUC rally outside the European Parliament in Strasbourg prior to the vote.

Time for action: Poster for the ETUC's Strasbourg demo

Attack on public sector pensions

Tory leader David Cameron has viciously attacked public sector final salary pensions.

In November he told Manchester business leaders he wanted to "end the apartheid in pensions." And Cameron's Tories continue to peddle the myth that public sector workers enjoy unduly generous pensions.

Dave Prentis, UNISON General Secretary, hit back. "Instead of starting a race to the bottom by attacking the pension rights of public sector workers," he said, "David Cameron should be calling for an end to the real cause of pension apartheid. He should be urging



Vicious: Cameron

private sector firms to face up to their responsibilities to their staff by setting up decent pension schemes. Countless private firms have closed their final salary pension schemes, leaving workers facing poverty in their retirement, while they continue to make huge profits."

Tin foil, not gold plate

"Public sector workers are tax and council tax payers," Prentis continued. "They save year in, year out for their

pension, and can look forward to an average of just £7,000 per year when they retire, falling to just £3,800 in local government. More tin foil than gold plated. The schemes they pay into have just been through a review, leading to significant changes to keep them affordable and sustainable.

"Nobody deserves to be forced into poverty in their retirement, but if public sector schemes were cancelled, millions of retired workers would be forced onto means tested benefits to make ends meet. This would leave the taxpayer to pay the price," Prentis concluded, "by leaving them with a benefits bill running into billions."

Tackling the gender pay gap

On 18 November the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women by a large majority.

The resolution argues for a revision of equal pay legislation. It points out the important role of collective bargaining in combating discrimination; makes recommendations to the European Commission aimed at tackling the gender pay gap; and calls for the Commission to produce a legislative proposal on the revision of existing equal pay legislation by 31 December 2009.

The Parliament recommends the introduction of compulsory regular pay audits for companies and the publication of their results.

'People First' is European Socialist Manifesto for 2009

The Party of European Socialists (PES) has launched its manifesto for the 2009 European elections. Under the title 'People First, A new direction for Europe', the manifesto features more than sixty proposals to create a fairer society.



People First:
The leaders of Europe's social democratic and socialist parties adopted the PES manifesto on 1 December at the Socialist Convention in Madrid

The main focus of the Party of European Socialists (PES) manifesto is the pledge to create 10 million jobs by 2020 through investment in transport infrastructure projects and environmental protection.

The programme calls upon all member states to adopt a national minimum wage and to increase EU support to developing countries to fight climate change. The Party reckons that 2 million jobs could be generated by renewable energy alone.

Temporary agency workers gain equal rights

On 22 October 2008, the European Parliament voted for equal treatment of temporary agency workers with those of the employer's company.

Claude Moraes MEP, Labour's Employment spokesperson said: "Labour MEPs have long fought for the protection of agency workers. This is an important step towards giving vulnerable and temporary workers in the UK a fair deal at work."

Stephen Hughes MEP, Socialist spokesperson on Employment said: "Labour

MEPs have won agreement on key elements of this legislation. Temporary agency workers can now expect equal pay and terms and conditions, including pension rights, paid leave, working time, access to employment, collective facilities and vocational training, health and safety and maternity leave. This agreement is vital for the rising number of UK agency workers."

Britain's 1.3 million agency workers will get the same pay and conditions as permanent staff after being employed for 12 weeks.

Manifesto highlights:

- European strategy for smart green growth to create 10 million new jobs by 2020
- Climate-changing emission reductions for industries such as transport and construction
- create a "more competitive and affordable high-speed rail network between major EU cities and regions"
- create an "integrated airspace" to make more direct flying routes
- change city transport to "save time and costs and reduce pollution"
- expand and modernise broadband and energy infrastructure
- increase funding for research and development
- regulate hedge funds and private equity funds through a reform of the global financial system
- European Pact on Wages for decent minimum wages in all EU member states
- impose limits on top executive pay and bonuses "so that earnings reflect losses as well as profits"
- ensure "massive technology transfer" to help developing countries develop without increasing global warming
- Stepping up the fight against the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation

Stop the SNP forest sell-off

SNP plans to hand over 25% of the national forest estate in Scotland for up to 75 years to large timberland investment companies in order to finance the Scottish Government's climate change commitments.

Hundreds of rural jobs could be under threat if the most lucrative parts of the Forestry Commission are effectively privatised.

Unions including GMB and Unite have been lobbying MSPs in opposition to the amendment to the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill which would enable these proposals to go ahead. And Labour's Rural Affairs and Environment team at the

Scottish Parliament is working to address mounting concern over the Scottish Government proposals.

Elaine Murray, Labour's Environment spokesperson said: "The SNP government states that its proposals could bring in as much as £200m. However if total control of these forests is passed over to the private sector, this could be early cash at the expense of future years' income as timber

"The government would, over the period of the lease, also lose out on any income from leisure and tourism."



Consulting on Calman

In its first decade, with a Labour led Scottish Executive, the Scottish Parliament made a real difference to the lives of the people of Scotland.

Earlier this year the Calman Commission was established with the support of the Scottish Parliament and the UK Labour Government to review how devolution for Scotland, within the framework of the Union, could be improved.

This independent Commission, chaired by Sir Kenneth Calman, has now published its interim report. To develop a Scottish Labour Party response to the report, the party's Scottish Executive Committee has established a Working Group and wants to hear the views of all sections of the Party including the affiliated unions.

The Calman Commission raises a list of questions

under these headings:

- **Principles: Devolution and the Union**
- **Powers and Functions of Scottish Parliament and Government**
- **Financial Accountability (including the question of how best to fund devolution)**
- **Relationships between the Parliaments, Governments and Institutions**

You can find these, plus the Commission's full interim report - and a summary of it - by visiting

www.commissiononscottishdevolution.org.uk

The deadline for submitting views on any of the Calman questions is 31 January 2009.

The views of affiliated unions will help to develop Labour's response to the debate on Scotland's future. Contact your own union or email

scotland@new.labour.org.uk for more information on the consultation.

in these forests is sold by the private investor instead of the government.

Campaign website: www.saveourforests.org.uk

Sign the petition at: www.ipetitions.com/petition/saveourforests/

For a fairer future

Labour's Programme at Westminster

The Queen's Speech 2008 - in other words, Labour's Legislative Programme for the Parliamentary session - has set out measures that will enable Britain to build a fairer future for all. Following the Pre-Budget Report in November, the Programme aims to help equip people to meet the economic challenges facing our country as a result of global downturn.

Secretary of State for Scotland Jim Murphy described it as "the most Scottish Queen's Speech since devolution."

He highlighted the UK-wide measures like the Banking Bill which will strengthen the UK's framework for financial stability and depositor protection.

"It is a clear sign the UK Government is listening and responding to the concerns of Scots and working in their interest. It is based on the living principles of fair rules, fair chances and fair futures.

"The main focus is rightly on measures to address the economic downturn and includes significant commitments to helping families and firms and to encouraging more people into sustained employment."



Jim Murphy MSP

This newsletter is published by the Scottish Trade Union Labour Party Committee

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Simply joining makes a difference

Trade Union members take pride in providing Scotland's public services. Tory plans to cut public services pose a real threat, that's why we need your help today. Every supporter that joins Labour sends a clear message of opposition to David Cameron and his cronies.

We are asking trade union levy paying members if they would like to join the Labour Party. This costs as little as £3 a month, and your contribution will be vital in Labour's campaign to keep the Tories out. Under Labour, Scotland is working. Don't let the Tories wreck it again.

Simply joining Labour is a big help to our work to stop the Tories taking Scotland backwards. To join, fill in the form below, and return the entire form to: **The Labour Party. FREEPOST, NAT 8909, Nottingham, NG2 1BR.**

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Home Telephone Number

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Trade Union (optional)

Paying by monthly Direct Debit saves the party £5 per member per year

I would like to join

I would like to donate

How much should I pay? - Standard Membership rate - £3 minimum per month. Reduced rate(eg unwaged)- min £1 per month.

Annual Income

Suggested Monthly Payment

Less than £20,000

£3

£20,000 - £25,000

£3

£25,000 - £30,000

£4

£30,000 - £40,000

£5

£40,000 - £50,000

£8

over £50,000

£10 or more

Campaigning for a fairer Britain costs money!

Can you afford to help?

Please use the guide opposite if you can give more.

Thank you.

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Originators identification number

Reference number (to be completed by The Labour Party)

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